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ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY SERVICE COUNCIL

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SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING SUMMARY

Meeting Date: August 19, 1998
Meeting Time: 10:00 A.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St.,
Room 156-A
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 4

Members Present: Sen. Vi Simpson (Chairperson); Sen. Glenn Howard; Alice Schloss.

Members Absent: None.

IDEM STAFFING

The Environmental Quality Service Council (EQSC) Indiana Department of Environmental Management (IDEM) Staffing Subcommittee discussed the recommendations that the Subcommittee would make to the full EQSC. Senator Simpson distributed a discussion document to the Subcommittee that contained specific IDEM staffing recommendations, general state agency staffing recommendations, and recommendations concerning related issues.

During the discussion on specific IDEM staffing recommendations, Senator Howard stated that IDEM needed more diversity and needed to do a better job recruiting young Indiana college graduates. Senator Howard also stated that there was a serious water problem in the city of Indianapolis. Glenn Pratt, environmental consultant, added that the Mayor of Indianapolis may ask the General Assembly to pass legislation that would allow the city's pollution control budget to be used for other purposes.

During the discussion on general state agency staffing recommendations, Mr. Pratt stressed the need to address the problem concerning minimum job requirements for scientific and technical positions within IDEM. Senator Simpson stated that IDEM's current requirements were similar to those in surrounding states.

In response to questions from Senator Simpson and Mr. Pratt, Dawnya Taylor, Director of the IDEM's Office of Human Resources Management, stated that IDEM was moving towards implementing a new personnel system that was based on a federal Department of Labor system. She said the new system would not "water down" IDEM hiring policies concerning skills and abilities.

Senator Howard stated that he felt the State Personnel Department was a "total joke" and should be shut down. He said he knew of numerous people who had applied for state jobs and had waited months without hearing anything about their applications. He said state agencies hired who they wanted anyway despite State Personnel Department rules and procedures.

Ms. Taylor said that she knew that hiring at IDEM had been a "cumbersome" process. She said that IDEM was implementing a new hiring process but that many of the problems concerning state hiring policies could not be solved by IDEM alone.

Bill Hayden, representing various environmental groups, stated that he too was concerned about lowering the qualifications for IDEM's scientific and technical positions. Senator Simpson said the General Assembly should not "micro manage" IDEM and said to properly function the agency needed some flexibility. Ms. Taylor stated that IDEM tries to fill each of its positions with the proper person but there were too many diverse positions that needed to be filled for each one to be filled with the perfect person.

Bill Beranek, President of the Indiana Environmental Institute, stated that IDEM was such a young and diverse agency that many "traditions" concerning hiring and staffing that were present in environmental agencies in other states and other Indiana state agencies, such as the Department of Natural Resources, were not present yet in IDEM. He said it might be appropriate to set at least minimum technical standards to "jump start" staffing expectations within the agency. Senator Simpson stated that not just IDEM but several state agencies had a conflict between the need to hire a large number of people to fill empty positions and the need to hire qualified people with the appropriate expertise and qualifications.

During a discussion on conducting an independent, external analysis of IDEM, Senator Simpson responded to questions from Ms. Schloss by stating that she felt there was not an appropriate state government entity that could perform the analysis. Senator Simpson said that unless an outside, independent analysis was performed, the process would become "political" and result only in short term solutions. Senator Simpson said that priorities must be set for IDEM for the next decade and the appropriate staff must then be matched to agency.

The Subcommittee voted three to nothing to make the following recommendations to the EQSC:

I. Specific IDEM Staffing Recommendations

A. Immediate need for additional staff is most severe in the Office of Water Management and the Office of Environmental Response.

1. The water quality monitoring and permitting staff should be increased to the current budget manning table level of 289 from its current staffing level of 227 (including temporary staff). This staff level is needed to increase monitoring, develop scientifically sound water quality data, and eliminate the backlog of NPDES permits.

2. The Office of Environmental Response staff should be increased to the current budget manning table level of 160 from its current staffing level of 124 (including temporary staff). There are existing needs in emergency response, state clean up (high risk clean up sites), the voluntary remediation program (VRP), and the developing RISC Program.

B. The Office of Solid and Hazardous Waste staff numbers have declined in recent years. Staff should be manned at the 1996 level of 184 positions to perform current responsibilities.

C. Future responsibilities assigned to IDEM by both the federal government and the Indiana General Assembly will create future needs in staffing.

1. In the Office of Air Management, the Title V and State Implementation Plans for Particulate Matter 2.5 and ozone will create a demand for additional technically sophisticated air pollution control staff.

2. In the Office of Water Management, non-point source pollution issues will require additional staff in the near future.

II. General State Agency Staffing Recommendations

A. High level scientific, engineering, and other positions requiring technical expertise should be reevaluated with regard to legitimately competitive salaries for the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel. For example, in IDEM chemists, toxicologists, and environmental attorneys should be reassessed and upgraded to recognize the necessary special acquired skills. These positions are currently assessed against non-comparable positions such as lab-bench chemists and general practice attorneys.

B. The State Personnel Department should be urged to recognize that the pressure on state agencies to hire additional numbers of staff may create a tendency to lower qualifications. The State Personnel Department must make an effort to ensure that minimum qualifications reflect appropriate levels of education and experience for scientific, technical, and legal staff positions.

C. As previously recommended by a General Assembly study committee and agreed to by IDEM, the State Personnel Department should establish a dual career track for professional positions with substantial regular advancement in compensation accrued from experience and competence in the same area. This will enable IDEM and other departments to recruit and maintain fully competent technical staff in non-managerial career ladders. A system analogous to the federal civil service ranking system should be considered.

D. "Temporary" positions and contract employees should only be utilized for truly temporary work or short term projects. In general, the use of "temporary" positions results in lower staff morale, the lack of consistency, and the loss of invaluable institutional memory. While it may save a few dollars and make state government appear smaller in the short term, in the long term it is "penny-wise and pound-foolish."

III. Related Issues

A. Water and waste permit fees were increased by the General Assembly in 1994 to provide funding from the regulated community for the processing of permits in a timely manner. The formula, which was established at a 60%/40% ratio, has allowed the hiring of additional staff to deal with the technicalities of permits and to work through all backlogs. Currently, approximately \$9 million has accumulated in the nonreverting permit fee fund. Legislation should be adopted to establish a system similar to the Clean Air Act permit fee fund accountability mechanism to ensure that the fee fund balance is maintained at a reasonable level and that the monies are used to achieve the identified objectives.

B. An independent external analysis should be conducted to consider whether the number of IDEM employees and the quality of IDEM employees are sufficient to meet the environmental policies and priorities of the administration and the General Assembly.

Senator Simpson adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.